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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE WRECK OF EUROPE. By Francesco Nitti. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

The broadest lesson of the Peace—and of the years following the Peace—seems to have been simply this: that the common conception of ethics has clashed with facts. The chief wrong-doer ought to be adequately punished—that seemed plain in 1918. There was a general disposition to concede whatever was demanded by the state of public feeling in France. “*Je supplie le conseil de se mettre dans l'esprit de la population française*,” Clemenceau is said to have pleaded repeatedly. (I beg the council to put itself into the state of mind of the French people.) “It was a moral concession, a moral satisfaction,” observes the former Premier of Italy, “that was demanded.”

But just what is meant by justice and morality in international affairs? The concessions and satisfactions required by France appear to have been punitive and to have had their origin in a perfectly natural distrust regarding the future. “In the mad struggle to break up Germany, there was involved not only hatred,” writes Francesco Nitti, “but also a quite reasonable anxiety which, after all, must be taken into account.” Yet this effort has had consequences economic, social, and political, which are in effect moral consequences, and these have reacted upon the victors: popular ethics has clashed with the facts.

Perhaps nothing could be more disastrous to the individual, as he views his own conduct, than the doctrine that he is not responsible for his own acts, or only in a small measure responsible for them, and that it is folly to try to make a punishment retributively adequate to the offense. The same truth holds in regard to those who assume responsibility for the guidance of a nation's destinies. Full assumption of responsibility, frank acknowledgment of guilt and honest willingness to abide by the consequences of one's own acts—these are the only tolerable *subjective* attitudes on the part of a man or a state. But when one views the case *objectively*, one cannot avoid seeing that, in fact, no human punishment can be made adequate to the crime, and that the effort to make it so involves the judge and the jury in the crime of the criminal—so it would be if the law inflicted torture for even the most fiendish offense. And one cannot help seeing that the individual wrong-doer—man or nation—shares responsibility for his wrong-doing with a whole social or political order. For the guilty party to think thus, is to think immorally and to endanger his own soul. For the injured party to think thus, is wisdom and mercy.

Our congenital inability to see both sides of this paradox *at once*, our disposition to waver uncertainly between the subjective and the objective view, to argue and to quarrel, like the two knights in the old story who saw opposite sides of the same shield—this weakness is what precipitates us into those moral controversies which are the bitterest, the most irreconcilable, and the most harmful of all struggles. If we could perceive both aspects of the truth at the same moment, or at moments so closely successive as to form parts of the same “specious present”, then perhaps we should realize the practical significance of the Christian doctrine of non-resistance to evil, and should understand that the magnanimity of a Julius Cæsar was not merely “policy”, but ethics.

All this seems to be the preaching of the facts, and never did facts preach more eloquently to a distracted world. Ex-Premier Nitti, the bluntest though not the most savage critic of the Peace, is their best exponent.

“The Peace Treaty as outlined by Wilson,” writes Signor Nitti, “would really have brought about a just peace;” but successive concessions destroyed its very foundation. The solemn pledges which more than any other cause destroyed the morale of the enemy and made peace possible were practically all nullified. The disarmament of the conquered without corresponding action on the part of the conquerors; the partition of Europe into political units corresponding neither to real racial affinities nor to economic needs; the demanding of huge and impossible indemnities; the creation of a Poland which, in the event of the eventual recovery of Germany and of Russia,—a recovery to be hoped for by any but a professed cynic,—will become a political impossibility; the failure to admit ex-enemy states into the League of Nations; the clause in the constitution of the League which provides that decisions are binding only when reached by unanimous consent, and that which pledges the members of the League to preserve existing territorial and political arrangements, clauses which transform the League into “an instrument of aggression for the victors”—these are some of the anomalies of the Peace upon which the author dwells with realism and with analytical patience.

The truth appears to be that not one of the countries of Europe which took part in the war is to-day so well off as it was at the time of the armistice. And the remedy is, in brief, the undoing of a large part of what has been done. One cannot simply amputate Germany, like a diseased limb. One cannot, without loss, merely isolate Russia as a plague spot destined to perish in its corruption, like a colony of economic lepers. These countries are part of the economic and social whole which is Europe, and their sickness or health affects the condition of the whole organism.

Perhaps the most ironic comment that has been made upon the Peace is Signor Nitti’s simple statement of the “sophisms” seriously discussed at the Paris Conference; to wit—

1. That it is not important to know what Germany can pay, but it is sufficient to know what she ought to pay.

2. That no one can foresee what immense resources Germany will develop within thirty or forty years, and what Germany will not be able to pay will be paid by the Allies.

3. That Germany, under the stimulus of a military occupation, will increase her production in an unheard-of manner.

4. The obligation arising from the treaty is an absolute one; the capacity to pay can only be taken into consideration to establish the number and amount of the annual payments; the total must in any case be paid within thirty years or more.

5. *Elle ou nous.* Germany must pay; if she doesn't, the Allies must pay. It is not necessary that Germany free herself by a certain date; it is only necessary that she pay all.

6. Germany has not to discuss, only to pay. Let time illustrate what is at present unforeseeable, etc., etc.

The first of these contentions, in particular, was opposed by the American commissioners.

THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHINA. By Sun Yat-sen. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Dr. Sun, who is now president of the Republic of Southern China,—one of the two loose political groups into which that country has been unhappily divided,—has been called a theorist and a dreamer. The present volume, with its pretentious programmes, its painstaking consideration of details that are parts of speculative plans, and its slight emphasis upon political or economic feasibility, does nothing to counteract this impression.

Foreign nations scarcely need to be reminded of the immense opportunity for exploitation that China affords, of her enormous natural resources and of her swarming population, affording an ideal market for the world's surplus goods. It is scarcely necessary to dwell on the enhanced importance of the problem of finding markets since the war. So far as the fundamental economic facts are concerned, Dr. Sun's grandiose schemes seem to rest upon a tolerably firm basis. But the schemes themselves are such as could scarcely have entered into the head of the Russian Czar or of the Japanese Imperial Government in their most sanguine moments. Here we have pages and pages of city-building, railroad-construction, building of harbors and canals—the complete reconstruction of China, in short, according to the specifications of an architect who has been told that “money is no object”, and who feels at complete liberty to indulge his fancies.

How can these things be? Dr. Sun calmly prophesies a new industrial revolution even more momentous than that which followed the introduction of machinery. “China will not only be the ‘Dumping Ground’ for foreign goods, but actually will be the ‘Economic Ocean’ capable of absorbing all the surplus capital as quickly as the Industrial Nations can possibly produce by the coming Industrial Revolution of Nationalized Productive Machinery. Then there will be no more competition and commercial struggles in China as well as in the world.” Thus, there will be no difficulty whatever in making Tientsin a port as large and as important as New York. The conclusion follows from the premises, “as the night the day”; yet perhaps no one but